

THE
CHRISTIAN MINISTRY
Not a Priesthood.

LATER VIEWS

IN

The Protestant Episcopal Church

CONTRASTED WITH THOSE MAINTAINED BY

THE ENGLISH REFORMERS.

BY

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PUBLISHED BY

GEORGE LYCETT, EPISCOPAL CHURCH BOOK STORE,
No. 35 N. CHARLES STREET, BALTIMORE.

1869.

VOICE OF THE MARTYRS, CONFESSORS AND FATHERS
OF THE
PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

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[This Tract was issued anonymously during the sitting of the General Convention of 1868. Why may not truth be presented under the form of pleasantry? Indeed the view of the subject so gravely and persistently urged by a small portion of the Church of England during the last two hundred years, and lately more earnestly than ever, seems to be treated as ludicrous alike by the Greek, the Roman, and all Protestant Churches.]

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The Christian Ministry Not a Priesthood.

Intelligent Churchmen, in our day, cannot but notice the manner in which the words priest, priesthood and the like are thrust upon us. There is a design in this. Advantage is taken of the double meaning of the words. Priest, as an abbreviation of the word presbyter (that is elder), has been retained in the Prayer Book. The word, as designating an offerer of sacrifice, is a very different thing, and is nowhere recognized by our Church except as applicable to Christ, the only true Priest, with his one altar and one sacrifice, once for all made on the cross.

The Jewish system had its priests, altar and sacrifices, but only as representative, typical, ceremonial. Why, then, cannot Christianity have a corresponding system now that Christ has come? Why not call the ministry a priesthood, and the Lord's Supper a sacrifice, and the holy table an altar? It ought to be reason enough for us that we know the inspired writers constantly avoid the use of such terms in this connection. The words to express the Jewish minister and the Christian and their acts are always carefully distinguished.

Very early Christians departed from the scriptural mode of speaking on this subject. The mistake was natural, but the effects were most mischievous. Christ and his divinely appointed intervention for the reconciliation of man to God, were more and more obscured by the obtrusive

services of the earthly priesthood, until at last there was need of a special interposition from above to restore the true doctrine. Christ providentially coming to assert his only priesthood, was met by crowds of resisting priests as ignorant and wicked as those he encountered at Jerusalem, and the people were such as might be expected from the substitution of man's folly for God's wisdom.

The Reformers in England and on the Continent were of one mind on this subject. They had before them the results of centuries of slavish subjection to the priest claiming to dispense mercy and grace by his transmitted authority, to the neglect of God's written word. The light of Divine Providence, combining with the newly revealed light of the scriptures, led them to see things as they had not been seen for generations before.

It may not be amiss to give in brief the summary of religious sentiment which the Reformation found prevailing, and which still prevails, in the Roman Church. The judicious Hooker, who was accused of moderating too much the opposition to Romanism, in substance writes as follows in the Sixth Book of the Ecclesiastical Polity:

“The Romanists imagine that when God remits the eternal punishment of sin, he reserves torments to be endured for a time shorter or longer according to the quality of men's crimes. Yet there is a certain contract by virtue of which works assigned by the priest shall satisfy God touching that punishment. Yet as they cannot assure any man that this will suffice, they hold that the soul must remain in unspeakable torture until all be paid. Therefore they advise men to secure prayers and sacrifices after they are gone. Hence the infinite pensions of their priests, the

building of so many altars and tombs, the enriching of churches, &c. But this done, how far it will avail they are not sure. Hence they have invented the idea that Christ's merits (over and above what are necessary for the remission of the eternal penalty), and those of the saints through him, are common stock, to which the Pope has the key. Christ remits not eternal death without the priest's absolution (unless in certain extreme cases), and the Pope, as it pleases him, delivers from the limited punishment which may remain."

It is well occasionally to look at the corruptions from which the Reformation freed us. What a contrast between such doctrine and that of full and perfect forgiveness to every one who believes in Jesus! What a yoke was that of those who had to submit to whatever a human priest might appoint before he could hope for peace with God! yea, not even then; for still there rested on the heart the fearful doubt whether enough had been done to insure deliverance from all torment hereafter. Whatever uncertainty there might be about this, there is no question that the belief of Peter's successor having the key to the "postern gate" of heaven has in former ages been the key to unlock many a sinner's treasures of gold and silver wherewith to endow the Church.

Our Church, in her Articles, makes no such claim for the ministry. She recognizes the office of "public preaching and ministering the sacraments," but of priestly intervention she says not a word.

In the Morning and Evening Prayer and in the Communion Office there are forms of absolution. The English Prayer Book has a special form of absolution for the sick "if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter." This has been omitted in our Visitation Office, and more-

over, we have added to the Ordination Office for Priests an alternate form which omits the words "whose sins thou dost forgive they are forgiven," &c., being our Lord's commission to His Apostles, as recorded in St. John, xx: 22, 23. These steps on the part of the American Church, and the change of the heading from "absolution" to a "declaration of absolution," are, no doubt, regretted by the advocates of the higher theory of ministerial power; but they may and do comfort themselves with the recollection that the Institution Office (not found in the English Prayer Book) gives them the word "altar," as well as several other sacerdotal modes of speech not had elsewhere. The Communion Office has been slightly altered to satisfy the same views, but it nowhere speaks of the Supper as a sacrifice. There is nothing so relied upon by the advocates of priestly powers as those words of our Lord before alluded to, and incorporated in the services of the Church. The question still remains, in what sense did Christ give to His Apostles the power of binding and loosing, remitting and retaining sins; and how far is any power given to them transmitted to the ministers of succeeding ages.

But before proceeding to notice how the great Reformers understood this language, and to point out how serious have been the departures from their views in our own day, it may not be amiss to see what Hooker, who lived in the age succeeding the Reformers, has said upon the subject.

He says the "word *presbyter* doth seem more fit and in propriety of speech more agreeable, than *priest* with the drift of the whole Gospel of Jesus Christ." Still he thinks there is no reason to be offended with the use of the latter word, if it be used, as he says the Fathers used it, "in regard of that which the Gospel hath *proportionable* to

ancient sacrifices ; namely, the communion of the blessed body and blood of Christ, although it have properly now no sacrifice.”*

Again, we read :

“ What is the force of absolution ? . . Doth it really take away sin, or but ascertain us of God’s most gracious and merciful pardon ? *The latter is our assertion.* . . “ Absolution hath two effects ; touching sin, it only declareth us freed from the guiltiness thereof . . but concerning right in sacred and divine mysteries . . upon our apparent repentance it truly restoreth our liberty . . Really to effect the removal or continuance of sin in the soul . . is no priestly act ; but a work which far exceedeth their ability.”—*Ecc. Pol., B. V., Sec. 6.*

In the same section he adds :

“ As for the ministerial sentence of private absolution it can be no more than a declaration what God hath done ; it hath but the force of the prophet Nathan’s absolution, “ God hath taken away thy sin,” *than which construction, especially of word’s judicial, there is not anything more vulgar* [common.] For instance the publicans are said in the Gospel to have “ justified God,” the Jews in Malachi to have “ blessed ” proud men, which sin and prosper ; not that the one did make God righteous or the other [make] the wicked happy ; but to bless, to justify, to *absolve are as commonly used for words of judgment or declaration as of true and real efficacy.*” . . “ God alone doth remit and retain sins, although he hath given power to the Church to do both ; but *he one way and the Church another.*”

The Romanists putting in such high claims for priestly intervention, are at times obliged to relax them and speak in a manner entirely inconsistent with themselves. This Hooker notices :

“ For my own part I am not able well to conceive how their doctrine” (expressed as before) “ can cleave with the Council of Trent, defining that contrition, perfected with charity, doth at all times, itself, reconcile offenders to God before they come to receive actually the sacrament of penance. How can it stand with those discourses of the learnedest rabbis [Romish doctors] which grant that ‘ whosoever turneth to God with his whole heart, hath immediately his sins taken away, &c.’ . . When those who are thus beforehand pardoned of God shall come to be also assoiled by the priest, I would know what force his absolution hath in

**Ecc. Pol., B. V., Sec. 78.*

this case? Are they able to say here that the priest doth remit anything? Yet when any of our's ascribeth the work of remission to God and interpreteth the priest's sentence to be but a solemn declaration of that which God himself hath already performed, they scorn at it."

After following up the various devices of his opponents about attrition and contrition, and desire of absolution, he adds :

"The further we wade the better we see it still appear that the priest doth never in absolution, no not so much as by way of service and ministry, really either forgive, take away the uncleanness or remove the punishment of sin," but the contrite have "absolution before absolution," that is before the formal words "and if not contrite although the priest should seem a thousand times to absolve him, all were in vain."

These quotations, from Hooker, are made for their intrinsic value as well as for testimony. And yet there is testimony to "this church's" doctrine more valuable than his, because that of the persons who drew up our formularies.

The dogma of sacerdotalism is inconsistent with the clear statements of the Article "Of the justification of man," and more especially with the enlarged expositions of the subject in the Homily to which reference is made in the Article itself. To say that all this refers only to the case of him to whom absolution is "conveyed" by the priest by word or by sacraments is to make the authors of those words very incapable of what they undertook; for on this matter (of all others the most important to the peace of the soul, nothing is said of any such conveyance. The sinner is represented as being absolved through faith in Christ. Not to have added that, beside Christ's intervention, God has appointed that of the human priest, and that our peace is only completed when he has pronounced our forgiveness, was a great omission, if the Reformers had believed in any such view. Thank God, they saw things more clearly. As

Hooker remarked above, and as old Bishop Andrewes said, the Romanists themselves are not consistent on this subject. The latter declares, "The very schoolmen, if you follow them from their questions and disputations, and seek them in their meditations and devotions," are found often to confess the insufficiency of every other hope and the all sufficiency of this, Christ crucified appropriated by the sinner to himself through a living faith.

Not only is the doctrine of a human priesthood not approved by the Homilies; they expressly repudiate it.

To believe that "Christ upon His cross made a full and sufficient sacrifice for thee . . . is to make Christ thine own and to apply His merits to thyself. Herein thou *needest no other man's help, no other sacrifice or oblation, no sacrificing priest.*"—*Homily on Sacrament.*

In speaking of the Romish doctrine of auricular confession, the Homily on Repentance answers the argument from the words, "Go show thyself to the priest."

"Do they not see that the leper was cleansed from his leprosy before he was by Christ sent unto the priest? By the same reason we must be cleansed from our spiritual leprosy. *I mean our sins must be forgiven us before that we come to confession.* What need we then to tell forth our sins into the ear of a priest sith [since] they be already taken away?" Ambrose is quoted, and explained as teaching that both "priesthood and the law [of Moses] being changed, we ought to acknowledge none other priest for deliverance from our sins but our Saviour Jesus Christ, who, being sovereign Bishop, doth with the sacrifice of his body and blood, offered once forever upon the altar of the cross, most effectually cleanse the spiritual leprosy, and wash away the sins of all those that, with true confession of the soul, do flee to him."

After all this testimony of our Church, in her authoritative documents, against the sacerdotal view, we would hardly have expected such bold and persistent assertion of it not only as true but as being hers.

Among the most plausible writers of that class is Sadler. His book, entitled, "Church Doctrine—Bible Truth," is very taking and thoroughly deceptive. Its doctrine is neither that of the Church nor the Bible. Its chief strength is its artful misrepresentation of evangelical views and the obscure presentation of its own. Its diffuse style enables it to hide the points of difficulty, while its constant repetition of a few phrases of Scripture imposes upon those who have a reverence for God's word, but are not capable or careful to interpret it by sense rather than by sound. As a specimen of the style of the work, read the following, in which he undertakes to state his views on the Christian Priesthood. They are expanded afterward over fifty pages:

"In addition, then, to the functions which her ministers discharge as teachers or preachers, .

. the Church claims for her ministers the exercise of certain other functions, which they exercise more officially as it were, but in the exercise of which functions they are supposed to convey certain great benefits pertaining to the kingdom of God to those who are in a fitting state to receive them."—(P. 209.)

Now here are words which mean much or little. Observe the writer's way of confounding things, as if there were nothing between being mere teachers and preachers and being priests. Again and again he speaks in the same way. Is it nothing to be a heaven-commissioned ambassador to speak with modified authority in Christ's name? Is it nothing to preside in the congregation of his people, unless we are also the bearers of priestly titles?

And then as to "conveying" the blessings of the Gospel, or, according to the language elsewhere employed, "dispensing" and "applying"

them, these terms are often used by those who never dream of a priestly signification. Is there no ministry among men but of the sacerdotal kind? By what various ministrations does God dispense spiritual blessings in the world? All Christians are, in a sense, priests offering acceptable sacrifices to God through Christ, and by prayers and intercessions, &c., "conveying" mercies to others. Of course this is specially true of those appointed to minister in the congregation.

To "convey" has another sense. It is used of official acts by which contracts and engagements are certified. The deed is said to "convey" property, but this, of course, in a metaphorical sense. It makes evident and is a standing testimony of a previous agreement between the parties. Those who minister in the affair are not spoken of as conveying anything, though if the word were applied to them it would, of course, not be in the same sense in which it is used of the party to the contract who transfers property or privilege. So, in a certain way, Christ's ministers may be said to convey, but it is more analogous to human transactions to apply the word to the doctrine of the Gospel and its divinely appointed seals—baptism and the Supper of the Lord—which *manifest* and *attest* God's gracious promise to believers.

We would then be left in doubt whether this writer differed at all from others were it not for his subsequent pages, in which he makes it appear that by "conveying," as applied to official acts of the ministry, he means something more than a solemn assurance in God's name and by His authority, together with the administration of the sacraments according to His appointment. Now, we may ask, what is there between that and the

actual dispensation of pardon and grace which belongs to the one Mediator, Jesus Christ? Has this writer, or any other, ever distinctly stated it? From first to last, our only satisfaction is to hear repeated "conveying, dispensing, applying" forgiveness and other spiritual blessings—language which admits of a good and may be intended in a very bad sense.

Sadler quotes, on almost every page of his chapters on Absolution, the words "Whose sins ye remit," &c., as if the mere repetition were enough. He appeals to us to take the words of Christ in all their plainness, but does not see, or at least fails to acknowledge, that he himself does not understand them in all their literality. He believes that the remission spoken of is only ministerial. In so speaking he is introducing a limitation, and the question is, what is that limitation? What is *ministerial* absolution? Is it that every one whom a minister pronounces absolved is truly absolved, and that whom he refuses to absolve God does not look upon with favor? No one professes that, although in ages of darkness some have trembled before the priest as if life and death hung upon his lips.

This writer is at a loss to understand how, according to the law, it could be said that the offering of the sacrifice should "make an atonement" for the sinner, that he should thereby be cleansed, and his sins forgiven, and yet St. Paul say that these offerings and sacrifices were of no power to take away sin. He thinks that the only way to reconcile the two is to suppose that "*the virtue of the one sacrifice was in some degree reflected back upon them*"—p. 217. Now here we have words to explain a difficulty themselves harder to be understood than the thing itself. What is meant by a reflection of the virtue of Christ's sacrifice upon

the Aaronical sacrifice? yea, that a reflection in "some degree" may suffice to take away sin? Such is the result of an attempt to compound the sign with the thing signified, to make a ceremony more than a ceremony, to give a literal signification to metaphorical language. Figurative language is to be figuratively taken, and if properly employed and received, makes things plain and impressive. When God speaks to men in the language of men, it is no disrespect to suppose that signs, symbols, ceremonials, figures in this case are employed as in human speech and actions generally.

Of Absolution, this writer truly says, the Apostles, "if they were faithful to their Master's commission, must frequently have exercised this power, and as he expresses it, "applied to those whom they absolved the atonement wrought out by their Master." A very reasonable conclusion. How is it then he does not mention some act of the kind? He could have found many cases in which they pronounced authoratively God's word of merciful reconciliation to penitents, and received them into the Church, but of that absolution of which he speaks, he can find not one.

There is, indeed, another species of absolution practiced by the Apostles, as connected with the visible society of Christ's people. An example we have in the case of the incestuous Corinthian. He, at the bidding of the Apostles, is cast out, and upon his repentance is restored, and his restoration is by St. Paul called forgiveness. "Whom ye forgive I forgive also." This great act of delivering an offending brother to Satan and bringing him back to Christian fellowship, is certainly an awful example of powers committed to Apostles and to the Church, and yet some writers who exalt mere sacerdotal power, make nothing of it. Sadler speaks of the power of remitting and retaining

sins as having nothing to do with the retention or removal of Church censures.*

The “*Annotated Prayer Book*” by Blunt has a similar perversion of the doctrine of the Church on the subject.† On the form of Absolution in the Daily Service, the writer remarks, that it has been made a question “whether those who composed it and placed it where it is, intended it for an absolution of penitent sinners, or merely for a declaration of God’s mercy. Secondly, whether, irrespective of their intention, it is so constructed as to be effective for the remission of sins.” He expresses himself decidedly against the declaratory view, and appeals—to what?—to the other writings of “those who composed the form and placed it where it is?” Not at all. He passes them by, and leaps over fifty years to the divines of another age. Bishop Andrewes’ name is mentioned (and eulogized) as authority to prove that it “was intended for an actual absolution.” Is this fair dealing? Every one knows what changes may take place in half a century, and this writer knew how different on this subject were the sentiments of the Reformers.‡

* A note at the end of Chapter V, betrays the writer’s lack of confidence in his own success. “Absolution is not merely declaratory. It must in *some sense* convey what it declares. The words of Christ are too strong for a merely declaratory absolution, &c.” Now when this writer shows what sense there can be beyond that which he rejects as insufficient, and that which he himself allows to be impossible, that man should absolve as God absolves, we are prepared to consider how far it agrees with Scripture and reason.—*P.* 247.

† It is not necessary to distinguish between the editor (Blunt) and his assistants, in speaking of their joint work.

‡ That this writer misinterprets Bishop Andrews on this subject, will be evident to those who peruse his sermon on the “*Lord our Righteousness.*” Such clear views of what the Gospel does for the sinner are inconsistent with the theory of ministerial absolution maintained by Blunt.

The corresponding form of absolution in the pre-Reformation services, as Blunt shows, was a prayer made by the priest for the people, and the people for the priest. Is it to be believed that the Reformers intended to give the priest a higher place than he had before?

“ The effect of this absolution on the daily exercises of the Church ” is thus stated : “ 1—To reconcile the Church as a community daily to her God through the mercies of Christ ; 2—To prepare each person present for the work of offering praise to him ; 3—To convey pardon of sin to an extent correlative with the extent of penitence in those over whom it is uttered.” Here is an explanation which, like many others on the same subject, is more abundant in words than in light. This reconciling mixed assemblies of sinners and saints in one mass to God, and this official preparation of “ each person present ” for offering praise acceptably, and this partial forgiveness “ correlative with the extent of repentance,” and all suspended upon the act of a mortal man, is a very different thing from that absolution so often described by the Reformers in the Homilies and other writings, free forgiveness of all penitents through Jesus Christ.

The mind of the writer appears yet more distinctly in his notes on the Absolution in the Visitation of the Sick, (according to the English form,) which says, the sick person shall “ be moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feels his conscience troubled with any weighty matter.” Now, this kind of confession he is pleased to designate by the ominous word “ Auricular.” He furnishes a form of confession of his own as well as (in a note) another from a writer of the seventeenth century. The latter form directs the priest after certain services to take his chair, and

the penitent "to kneel down before him, and to answer to such questions as he shall, by Christ's authority, demand of him." Finally, Blunt gives us in a note a Latin quotation from the Romish Manual of Salisbury, which he significantly says may be "usefully annexed." And what is this? Why, to the effect that in ministering absolution the priest is not to lay on hands, but only to sign with the cross.

Thus we see what progress has been made in the endeavor (avowed by some) of undoing the Reformation. Doubtless there are some ministers who long for such a state of things; but what do the laity think of it? Here is remission conveyed only through a priest, and private confession recommended in which the penitent shall, upon his knees, before the priest sitting in his chair of authority, confess and answer all questions propounded, before he can hear God's viceregent pronouncing him absolved.

All this is proposed, not in a work by an obscure writer, but in a large and learned book, by one whose great research and ingenuity are successfully employed to divert the attention of the reader from the meaning of the formularies as they came from the hands of their authors, God's work and that of the ministers in absolution, are so obscured and confounded that it would be a miracle indeed if any anxious soul could ascertain from this author's notes how he is to find the peace of the Gospel.*

A third writer of popular books inculcating

* After the use made of our Lord's words in John xx: 21-23, as if they were necessary to the ministerial commission, who would have thought that the Church never found this out until the thirteenth century. Blunt shows this form for conveying the power of absolution is comparatively modern. Annotat. Prayer B., p. 563.

this view of the ministry, though not quite so far advanced as the other two, is Goulburn. He too lays down "Absolution to be the fundamental power of the Christian ministry." He acknowledges that according to the idiom of Scripture, "things are said to be done by God's messengers which are only announced by them under His commission and authority."* If this is all that this writer means by "declaring and conveying" absolution, in what does he differ from those of whom he speaks somewhat opprobriously, as if they made nothing of ministerial authority? But it is to be apprehended that he means more than mere authoritative declaration, for he speaks of absolution† as "really conveying" the pardon of sin.

Now what does this mean? Is it what Wheatly expresses, in his work on the Common Prayer, "an *actual* conveyance of pardon at the *very instant* of pronouncing it?" So that however penitent a man may be, his sins are not remitted by God until His minister on earth has pronounced the appropriate words. If this be not intended, what is? On such a subject no Christian writer has the privilege of expressing himself obscurely. To limit God's mercy in a manner in which He has not limited it, or to speak uncertainly about God's immediate pardon of all

*Farewell Counsels, page 4.

Much reliance is placed by Goulburn and others (as by Harding and the Roman Catholics) upon Matt., ix: 6, as if from Christ, the Son of Man, forgiving sins, there were an easy and obvious step to ministers of all ages, exercising the same power. This view seems to have escaped the notice of almost all the great interpreters, and labors under the disadvantage of being a rival to the plain interpretation, that Christ is here asserting for himself a divine prerogative, although in appearance but a man, and so establishing our faith in him as the Refuge of sinners.

† Page 25.

who truly repent and believe, is enough to vitiate any sermon or treatise however piously intended. To teach, as such writers seem to do, that in the single matter of deliverance from the guilt of sin the soul must seek its comfort from the lips of the minister, not as announcing the Divine promises to the penitent, but as officially giving what was not had before, absolution; what is this but a perversion of the Gospel as great as that which called down upon the Galatians the indignant rebuke of an Apostle. It is a confounding of things Divine and human. If it means anything it is an assumption of what Scripture and reason unite in asserting does not belong to man.*

How refreshing to turn from such obscure, unsatisfactory, and, as far as we can understand it, unscriptural teaching to that of the Church, as luminously expressed in her public documents, and in the words of her first and greatest divines.

Hear Cranmer. Omitting many passages (some of them to be used in another tract) in which the denial of the sacerdotal character of the Christian ministry is connected with the denial of the sacrificial nature of the Lord's Supper, we quote as follows:

"Christ himself in his own person made a sacrifice for our sins. . . . *And the benefit hereof is in no man's power to give unto any other, but every man must receive it at Christ's hands by his own faith.*"—*Vol. I., page 47.*

"The difference between the priest and the layman in this matter is *only in the ministration; that the priest as a common minister of the Church doth minister and distribute the Lord's Supper.* . . . All remember Christ's death, all give thanks to

* Goulburn strongly objects to the proposal and practice of some in this country and England, of making private confession and absolution a common thing. But why not, if his views of ministerial conveyance of pardon be correct? Public absolution will not long satisfy those who are taught so much hangs on the lips of the priest.

God, all repent and offer themselves an oblation to Christ. . . . This nothing diminisheth the estimation and dignity of priesthood. . . . For if they are much to be loved, honored and esteemed that be . . . ministers in temporal matters, how much then are they to be esteemed that be ministers of Christ's words and sacraments, and have to them committed the keys of heaven to let in and shut out by the ministration of His word and Gospel."—Page 350.

After complaining of the contradictions, ambiguities, perplexities and absurdities of the Romish doctrine, he says :

"The true doctrine . . . is plain . . . and comfortable to all Christian people. . . . What can be more comfortable to a penitent sinner . . . than to know that Christ dischargeth him of the heavy load of his sin? . . . And if we shall join the priest herein in any part, and give a portion hereof to his sacrifice . . . what a discourage [ment] is this to the penitent sinner! . . . what perplexities and doubts rise hereof in the sinner's conscience! And what an obscuring and darkening is this of the benefit of Christ!" Page 366.

Let us see what Bishop Latimer has to say on the subject. At his examination a Papist speaks scornfully of the "heretical translated Bible," for not applying the word priest to the Christian ministry. He answers:

"A minister is a more fit name for that office, for the name of a priest importeth a sacrifice."

"I may absolve you as an officer of Christ in the open pulpit in this wise: 'As many as confess their sins unto God . . . and believe that our Saviour hath taken away their sins, and have an earnest purpose to leave sin, as many, I say, as be so affectioned, . . . I, as an officer of Christ, as His treasurer, absolve you in his name.' This is the absolution that I can make by God's word."—*Latimer's Works*, Vol. I., p. 424.

"They that can be content with the general absolution which every minister of God's word giveth in his sermons when he pronounceth that all that be sorry for their sins and believe in Christ, &c., all these that be so minded shall have remission of their sins, I say they that can be content with this general absolution, it is well.—*Latimer*, Vol. II, p. 12.

He then proceeds to notice the case of those whose hearts are not then at rest, and advises

them to seek advice from some godly, learned minister.

Ridley, writing to Latimer, charges the "mass sacrifice" as being inconsistent with Christ's. In response Latimer says, among other things:

"St. Paul saith: 'They that serve the altar, &c. Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.' Why doth he not rather say they that *sacrifice in the mass*?"—*Ridley's Works*, p. 107.

Again:

"The minister of the Gospel *hath rather to do for Christ with the people than for the people with God*, except it be in praying and giving of thanks; and so hath the people as well to do with God for the minister. The office of reconciliation standeth in *preaching*, not in offering."—*Ridley's Works*, p. 111.

Ridley says:

"There are but two only orders of priesthood allowed in the word of God, the order of Aaron and the order of Melchizedek. But now the order of Aaron is come to an end, . . . and of the order of Melchizedek there is but one priest alone, even Christ the Lord, *who hath a priesthood that cannot pass to any other*."—*Ridley's Works*, p. 208.

The above is from a bishop distinguished for his zeal in substituting what he called an "honest table" for the old Romish altar. No wonder that those who would change the doctrine of the martyred Ridley are earnest in the restoration of the altar and all its sacrificial appendages.*

* On page 321, &c., of Ridley's Works, we have a paper showing the "Reasons why the Lord's board should rather be after the form of a table than of an altar." His opponents objected to his proceedings, upon the ground that the Prayer Book then in use recognized altars. To this he replies, "it called the thing whereupon the Lord's Supper is ministered indifferently a table, an altar, and the Lord's board," and that thus nothing is to be determined from the mere name. He justifies himself in many words, of which the first two sentences may suffice: "The form of a table shall ever swerve the simple from the superstitious opinions of the Popish mass unto the right use of the Lord's Supper. For the use of an altar is to make sacrifice upon it; the use of a table is to serve for men to eat upon."

The name of Bishop Jewel carries great weight with all who respect the authority of our Church. His *Apology* is not to be considered in the light of a private treatise, but as nearly as possible a public document of the English Church as reformed. What does it set forth on the subject?

“We say that Christ hath given to His ministers power to bind, to loose, &c., and that the office of loosing consisteth in this point, that the minister should either offer by the preaching of the Gospel the merits of Christ and full pardon to such as have lowly and contrite hearts, . . . pronouncing unto the same a sure and undoubted forgiveness; . . . or else that the minister, whenever any have offended their brother's minds by any great offense, . . . after perfect amendment, . . . doth reconcile them, . . . and restore them to the company of the faithful.”

He proceeds to quote ancient authorities on the subject.

“Touching the keys wherewith they may either shut or open the kingdom of heaven, we say with Chrysostom, they be ‘the knowledge of the Scriptures;’ with Tertullian, ‘the interpretation of the law;’ and with Eusebius, ‘the word of God.’”

He enlarges upon the subject, and declares that ministerial power is to—

“Publish abroad the Gospel, and be unto the believing a sweet savor of life unto life, and unto the unbelieving and unfaithful a savor of death unto death; and that the minds of godly persons being brought low by the remorse of their former life and errors, after they once began to look up unto the light of the Gospel and believe in Christ, might be opened with the word of God, even as a door is opened with a key,” &c., &c.—*Apology, Part II, Chap. VI.*

Jewel's antagonist, Harding, charges that in such statements as the above, the office of preaching and that of absolution are confounded, and says if this be all, then why may “not every layman, yea, women, yea, young boys and girls, assoil sinners?” He argues that the words of Christ are plain, and that without absolution the “priest hath no special power;” in short he uses just the

arguments we now hear from some in our own Church.* To this, Jewel responds from Augustine and Theophylact, that “laymen do bind and loose when they reject from or receive to fellowship a Christian brother,” and that the doctrine as thus ridiculed ought not to be strange to one whose Church allowed an “old wife or young girl” to administer baptism in an emergency.

The Jesuit had objected that upon Jewel’s theory the power of the keys consisted not so much in the minister as in the sinner that heareth and believeth. The answer is that

“The difficulty is in the doubtful taking of one word. One thing may be *in* another sundry ways. Remission of sins may be *in* the priest as in the messenger, *in* the word of God as in the instrument, *in* the penitent party as in the receiver. The *offering* hereof is in the minister, but the effect and force is in the sinner.”
— *Vol. III, page 358.*

If the Reformation meant anything, it meant the expulsion of the priest from his usurped place in the house of God, with his altar and sacrifice, where he claimed to sit as God’s vicegerent; as one whose ministrations were ordinarily necessary to forgiveness, and all spiritual blessings. He denied immediate access to the one Mediator, and professed that Christ had committed to him his “power on earth to forgive sin.” When hard pressed by an intelligent opponent, he had to acknowledge a difference between his absolution and ministration and those of the one High Priest, and by nice distinctions of words he endeavored

*This is exactly like the saying of Dr. Philpots, the present Bishop of Exeter, that if to absolve be only declaratory, then his “verger” could do it as well as himself. This is quoted in notes to a Charge by Dr. Kerr, Bishop of Salisbury, the see once occupied by the great bishop quoted above. The views on the subject, expressed in the Charge, are those of the Papist Harding, and not those of Jewel; one of the many instances of local without doctrinal succession.

to confound the objector, but practically, so far as he succeeded, men trembled before him as the dispenser of life and death. Taught, as we believe, of God, the Reformers everywhere in the sixteenth century rose up and expelled the usurper from a large part of the Church of Christ, and vindicated the Saviour's and the sinner's rights of free communion with each other, and remanded the ministry to its proper place of opening and pressing upon the attention of mankind "the faithful saying worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and that "whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved."

The priest is again at the door of our portion of the spiritual house clamoring for admittance. He again utters his loud demand, repeating the words of Christ, but neglecting their true meaning, and again presents his sophistical distinctions to satisfy the doubter. How far he can succeed in this enlightened times is uncertain. We do not look for such triumphs as he achieved in darker ages, but we do fear that many a soul who else might have found Christ, and enjoyed all the liberty and comfort of Gospel hope, may be defrauded of his heritage, and many more, disgusted with the absurdities of the sacerdotal system, will be led to doubt about Christianity, and encouraged to give themselves up to the darkness of unbelief.

P. S.—American Episcopalians have reason to rejoice in the introduction of the alternate form in the ordination of priests. The English Churchman is not so favorably situated, and the advocates for Liturgical Revision there (such as Fisher), make out a strong case from the Ordinal and the office for the Visitation of the Sick. It is to be feared that in their well intentioned zeal some in England and America have (naturally enough) exaggerated the Romanistic complexion of the services, and thus greatly favored the claims of the ultra Churchmen.

For instance, it must be granted the Apostles had the power of Absolution given them in those words so much objected to. Can we maintain that this power, whatever it be supposed to be, was of such a nature as not to be transmissible? Is there no danger of straying too far from the language of Divine inspiration on this and other subjects? The remedy for perversion is not to renounce, but to explain the terms of Scripture in analogy with the whole. If all of Scripture that is misinterpreted were disused, how much would remain?

Every intelligent reader who peruses these pages must be struck with the contrast between the views of these Fathers of our Church and of the late writers we have quoted. The authorities referred to in this and the other tracts are chiefly the three great names of the English Reformation, and the quotations (greatly to the disadvantage of the subject) are in the most abridged form. If curiosity is awakened to read what they have written at large, the object of these pages will be attained. Beside the noble three, there are others of that period who have written as distinctly to the same effect. Whom shall we consult on the doctrine of our own blessed Church—those who reformed or those who are now aiming to deform it?